

Oppose the rational

John French

It's striking how artists create and through innovating, defining, re-interpreting - this enables us as outsiders to look back into society and achieve a deeper meaning. This seemingly disruptive process, unlike anything a scientist would recognise both evolves and develops into the contemporary narrative that later gets written up and fixed in time as a movement or period.

The Bauhaus movement was prematurely curtailed but the core messages live on into the 21st century and in actual fact the clarity of architectural thinking demonstrated by Gropius is now at the heart of lean and minimalist architecture as we see it today in buildings like the new UEA Enterprise Centre. Lean because the green built environment, the future, buildings that mitigate climate change and spaces that have been created for the human experience, require the same expedient modernism, efficiency and purpose as developed in the 1930's only the need for much faster progress in addressing climate change has raised the bar.

I'd like to think that with the compression of time the labels we give to types of art, and movements, become irrelevant, however, it's clear to me that we need to debate if the 'arts' provide sufficient critical commentary about contemporary issues of sustainability, climate change, inequality and the values that maintain society. Does art, if it holds a mirror up to society to describe its ills, have in itself, to be intrinsically pure and uncontaminated to convey its critical message? Surely not.

Fat chair (Beuys 64) for me is profound and remains one of the strongest works. The body of work Joseph Beuys contributed remains one of the most powerful impacts on my own interests in ecology, sustainability and design and yet his work also attempts to heal and opposes the "rational" in contemporary society.

Described by some as neo dada-ism I prefer to think he paved the way for eco-minimalism to develop as our awareness of 'eco' has deepened further.

An anti- disciplinary approach describes the response of many 21st century artists seeking to kick society out of its complacency. I see the work of Byzantia Harlow in this way, weaving multiple threads of practice and experience into her work and giving us some fundamental insights and challenges into anti-disciplinarity and anti-rationality.

Her work is not safe.

It is both dangerous and disturbing and forces us to re-evaluate our assumptions and deal head on with contemporary issues in society.

Disruption

Rationality

Eco

Da Da

Inequality

Fat

Minimal

Climate